

## Message Text

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ACTION HA-05

INFO OCT-01 EA-10 NEA-10 IO-13 ISO-00 AID-05 EB-08  
CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00  
NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11 TRSE-00 /105 W  
-----001757 290957Z /16

P R 290523Z AUG 78  
FM AMEMBASSY DACCA  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 596  
INFO AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI  
AMEMBASSY RANGOON  
USMISSION GENEVA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 DACCA 5302

PASS AID/OFDA

E.O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: UNHCR  
SUBJ: ARAKANESE REFUGEES

REF: A. DACCA 5250; B. RANGOON 3115

SUMMARY: ACCORDING TO THE BANGLADESH FOREIGN SECRETARY AND THE UNDP REPRESENTATIVE IN DACCA THE BURMESE, WITH GOODWILL, ARE BENDING OVER BACKWARDS TO INCLUDE AS MANY REFUGEES AS POSSIBLE WITHIN THE THREE CATEGORIES TO WHICH THE TWO GOVERNMENTS HAD AGREED FOR REPATRIATION. BOTH SOURCES INDICATE NE WIN WAS PERSONALLY THE MOTIVATING FORCE FOR THE AGREEMENT AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION AND SPECULATE THAT CONCERN ABOUT A CROSS-BORDER INSURGENCY IS RESPONSIBLE FOR HIS ATTITUDE. THE MAJOR CURRENT ISSUE CONCERNING THE REFUGEES IS WHETHER THEY WILL BE WILLING TO RETURN. UNCHR HAS INDICATED IT WILL SUPPORT ONLY VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION AND IS NEGOTIATING WITH THE BANGLADESH GOVERNMENT CONCERNING WHAT EVIDENCE WILL BE ACCEPTABLE REGARDING THE REFUGEES WILLINGNESS TO GO. UNHCR REPRESENTATIVE KOHAUT IS EXPECTED TO  
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ACCOMPANY THE FIRST TOKEN MOVEMENT OF 200 REFUGEES ACROSS THE BORDER ON AUGUST 31. THE AMBASSADOR HAS CONVEYED THE DEPARTMENT'S AND THE EMBASSY'S CONCERNS REGARDING THE ADEQUACY OF THE RELIEF EFFORT AND FLOW OF INFORMATION REGARDING RELIEF SUPPLIES TO UNDP CHIEF ZAGORIN AND BANGLADESH RELIEF MINISTER MONDAL. WHILE THE UNDP CHIEF IN DACCA OPTIMISTICALLY ESTIMATES 150,000-

170,000 REFUGEES WILL RETURN TO BURMA, WE BELIEVE THE ESTIMATE OF 100,000 WHICH UNHCR REPRESENTATIVES GAVE TO EMBASSY RANGOON IS CLOSER TO THE MARK. THE BANGLADESH RELIEF MINISTER TOLD THE AMBASSADOR THAT THE BDG WILL NOT CONSIDER POST-DECEMBER RELIEF NEEDS UNTIL IT SEES HOW REPATRIATION PROCEEDS. END SUMMARY

1. IN SEPARATE CONVERSATIONS DURING THE PAST WEEK, UNDP REP ZAGORIN AND FOREIGN SECRETARY TABARAK HUSAIN PROVIDED THE AMBASSADOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION OF INTEREST ABOUT THE BANGLADESH-BURMA AGREEMENT ON REPATRIATION OF REFUGEES AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION. ZAGORIN, DRAWING ON INFORMATION OBTAINED FROM UNHCR TEAM WHICH VISITED RANGOON, AND HUSAIN BOTH MAINTAINED THAT THE BURMESE HAVE BEEN SHOWING EVERY INDICATION OF WANTING TO MAKE THE AGREEMENT WORK. UNHCR FOUND MUCH GOODWILL IN RANGOON AND CONCLUDED THAT THE BURMESE WERE BENDING OVER BACKWARDS TO INCLUDE AS MANY REFUGEES AS POSSIBLE WITHIN THE THREE CATEGORIES OF LEGAL RESIDENTS WHICH THE AGREEMENT PROVIDES REPATRIATION (ACCORDING TO FOREIGN SECRETARY AND THE BURMESE AMBASSADOR THESE CATEGORIES ARE: THOSE REFUGEES HAVING RESIDENCE CERTIFICATES; THOSE REFUGEES HAVING OTHER DOCUMENTS SUCH AS SCHOOL CERTIFICATES; AND THOSE REFUGEES WHO CAN PROVIDE OTHER EVIDENCE, SUCH AS A DESCRIPTION OF THE AREA IN WHICH THEY RESIDED, WHICH WOULD INDICATE PREVIOUS RESIDENCE IN ARAKAN). UNHCR REPRESENTATIVES SAY THAT  
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THE BURMESE HAVE INDICATED WILLINGNESS EVEN TO GIVE NEW REGISTRATION CERTIFICATES TO PERSONS WITHOUT THEM. BOTH ZAGORIN AND HUSAIN AGREED THAT THE STRONGEST ADVOCATE FOR CARRYING OUT THE AGREEMENT WAS NE WIN HIMSELF, ALTHOUGH ENTHUSIASM WANED DOWN THE BUREACRATIC LADDER IN BURMA. WHILE NEITHER SOURCE KNEW FOR SURE NE WIN'S MOTIVATION, THEY BOTH GUESSED IT WAS HIS WORRY ABOUT A CROSS-BORDER INSURGENCY, PERHAPS SUPPORTED BY THE LIBYANS (WE HAVE HEARD ANOTHER REPORT OF A DEAL INTER-RELATING THE BANGLADESH-BURMESE BORDER SETTLEMENT WITH REFUGEE REPATRIATION). HUSAIN IN HIS DISCUSSIONS WITH NE WIN AND OTHER BURMESE OFFICIALS HAD SPOKEN OF THE DANGERS OF SUCH AN INSURGENCY. HE TOLD THE AMBASSADOR THAT BANGLADESH WAS NOT ENTIRELY BLAMELESS REGARDING THE ARAKANESE SEPARATIST MOVEMENT SINCE IN THE PAST BURMESE MUSLIM SEPARATISTS HAD COME ACROSS THE BORDER AND OBTAINED SUPPORT FROM BANGLADESHIS IN CHITTAGONG. DURING THEIR DISCUSSIONS WITH THE BURMESE, THE BANGLADESHIS AGREED THAT IN THE FUTURE THEY WOULD TRY TO CONTROL ACTIVITY BY SEPARATISTS ON THE BANGLADESH SIDE OF THE BORDER. ZAGORIN IS SO MUCH ENCOURAGED BY THE BURMESE ATTITUDE TOWARD REPATRIATION THAT HIS PERSONAL ESTIMATE OF THE NUMBER WHO WILL BE ACCEPTED BY

THE BURMESE IS NOW BETWEEN 150,000 AND 170,000.

2. ACCORDING TO HUSAIN, THE BANGLADESHIS URGED THE BURMESE TO ACCEPT A UNHCR ROLE IN REPATRIATION, SAYING THAT A UNHCR PRESENCE WAS IMPORTANT FOR PERSUADING THE REFUGEES TO RETURN.

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USMISSION GENEVA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 DACCA 5302

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (TEXT CORRECTED)

THE BANGLADESHIS CITED THEIR FAVORABLE EXPERIENCE IN THE PAST WITH THE UNHCR AND EXPLAINED THAT UNHCR DID NOT REQUIRE LARGE NUMBERS OF EXPTRIATES AND WOULD PERMIT THE BURMESE A VOICE IN THE NATIONALITY OF PEOPLE SELECTED. WHILE ZAGORIN WAS NOT AWARE WHETHER THE BURMESE HAD ACCEPTED A UNHCR PRESENCE IN ARAKAN, HE SAID THAT THEY HAD AGREED TO UNHCR MOVEMENT BACK AND FORTH BETWEEN THE BANGLADESH REFUGEE CAMPS AND THE TEN REFUGEE RECEIVING CAMPS WHICH THE BURMESE ARE ESTABLISHING ON THEIR SIDE OF THE BORDER. IN FACT, UNHCR REP KOHAUT PLANS TO ACCOMPANY TO THE BURMESE CAMP THE FIRST TOKEN 200 REFUGEES SCHEDULED TO BE REPATRIATED AT THE END OF AUGUST. ZAGORIN WOULD EXPRESS NO VIEW AS TO WHETHER THE REFUGEES WOULD BE WILLING TO RETURN. UNHCR HAS MADE IT CLEAR HOWEVER THAT IT WILL SUPPORT ONLY VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION. IT IS NEGOTIATING WITH THE BANGLADESH GOVERNMENT REGARDING WHAT EVIDENCE OF WILLINGNESS TO RETURN WILL BE ACCEPTABLE; UNHCR WOULD LIKE SIGNED STATEMENTS OF WILLINGNESS, BUT THE BDG PREFERS TO ACCEPT THE ABSENCE OF OBJECTION AS EVIDENCE. UNHCR IS WARY OF THIS BDG POSITION AND CONSIDERS THE WHOLE ISSUE VERY DELICATE.

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3. FOLLOWING THE INITIAL TOKEN MOVEMENT OF 200 AT THE END OF AUGUST, THE BDG PLAN IS TO REPATRIATE 4,000 REFUGEES PER WEEK STARTING IN MID-SEPTEMBER. UNHCR DOES NOT BELIEVE THAT IT WILL BE POSSIBLE TO MAINTAIN THIS RATE.

4. THE AMBASSADOR CONVEYED TO ZAGORIN THE DEPARTMENT'S CONCERNS ABOUT THE CONDITION OF REFUGEES, THE ADEQUACY OF REFUGEE RELIEF AND THE ADEQUACY OF UNHCR REPORTING ON RELIEF SHIPMENTS AND PLEDGES IN ACCORDANCE WITH STATE 207875. ZAGORIN BLAMED THE BANGLADESH GOVERNMENT FOR THE INADEQUACY OF THE RELIEF EFFORT, SAYING THAT UNHCR HAS HAD TO MAKE VERY FORCEFUL PRESENTATIONS TO THE RELIEF MINISTRY TO BRING THE RELIEF EFFORT TO ITS CURRENT LEVEL AND IT WAS ONLY AFTER THE FOREIGN MINISTRY INTERVENED THAT THE BDG AGREED TO EXTRA RATIONS AND SPECIAL FEEDING. THE PRINCIPAL ARGUMENT OF THE BDG WAS THAT ITS OWN PEOPLE DID NOT HAVE SUCH SERVICES, WITH BDG PERFORMANCE IN MIND, THE AMBASSADOR DURING A COURTESY CALL ON RELIEF MINISTER MONDAL ON AUGUST 28 CONVEYED USG CONCERNS REGARDING THE MALNUTRITION AND DEATH RATE OF REFUGEES AND ASKED WHETHER THE SPECIAL RAMAZAN RATIONS FOR CHILDREN MIGHT NOT BE EXTENDED. THE AMBASSADOR INDICATED US CONCERN CAME FROM BOTH THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH AND THE CONGRESS. MONDAL AGREED THAT THERE HAD BEEN PROBLEMS IN MANAGEMENT OF RELIEF EFFORT WHICH HAD RESULTED IN SOME SHORT RATIONS BUT MAINTAINED THAT EXTRA RATIONS COULD NOT BE CONTINUED BEYOND RAMAZAN AND MINIMIZED EXTENT OF MALNUTRITION. ASKED ABOUT BDG PLANS FOR A FURTHER APPEAL FOR POST DECEMBER REQUIREMENTS, MONDAL REPLIED THAT THE BDG WISHED TO DEFER CONSIDERING THIS WHILE IT SAW HOW REPATRIATION PROCEEDED. IN REGARD TO REPORTING TO DONORS ZAGORIN SAID THE UNHCR WOULD NOT CREATE A FORMAL DONOR COORDINATION MECHANISM BUT  
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HE AND UNHCR REP KOHAUT WOULD DISCUSS HOW US REPORTING NEEDS MIGHT OTHERWISE BE MET.

5. COMMENT: WE BELIEVE WE CAN INDUCE SOME IMPROVEMENT IN UNHCR REPORTING TO DONORS AND INCREASE PRESSURE ON BDG TO IMPROVE RELIEF EFFORT, BUT WE DOUBT THAT WE CAN BRING ABOUT A FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE IN UNHCR'S METHOD OF OPERATING. INDEED, THIS METHOD, PARTICULARLY THE SPARE STAFFING UNHCR EMPLOYS, HAS HELPED UNHCR GAIN ACCEPTANCE

WITHIN BANGLADESH AND EVEN A ROLE IN BURMA. ALL  
OBSERVERS NOW AGREE THAT THE CRUCIAL ISSUE REGARDING  
REFUGEES IS WHETHER OR NOT THEY WILL VOLUNTARILY ACCEPT  
REPATRIATION; THE REACTION OF THE FIRST 200 IS SEEN AS  
CRUCIAL. DESPITE ZAGORIN'S OPTIMISM THERE IS STILL  
CONSIDERABLE SKEPTICISM ABOUT THE NUMBER OF REFUGEES THE  
BURMESE WILL ACCEPT; HOWEVER, AS THE BANGLADESH-BURMA  
NEGOTIATIONS HAVE PROCEEDED, THE SKEPTICS HAVE SO FAR BEEN  
PROVED WRONG. WE CONSIDER THE 100,000 FIGURE PROVIDED BY THE UNHCR  
TEAM TO EMBASSY RANGOON IS A SAFER ESTIMATE.  
WE BELIEVE THE BANGLADESH STRATEGY FOR DEALING  
WITH THE BURMESE REGARDING THE REFUGEE PROBLEM  
(FULL INTERNATIONAL PUBLICITY, INTERNATIONAL RELIEF, BUT STRICTLY  
BILATERAL NEGOTIATIONS) HAS SO FAR BEEN VERY FRUITFUL AND FOREIGN  
SECRETARY TABARAK HUSAIN IS ENTITLED TO MUCH OF THE  
CREDIT. HE CLAIMS THAT HE RESISTED PRESSURES TO TAKE THE  
ISSUE TO INTERNATIONAL FORA ON THE STRENGTH OF THE WARM  
RECEPTION GIVEN HIM BY NE WIN DURING HIS VISIT TO RANGOON.  
THE EMBASSY HAS NOW RAISED ALL OF THE ISSUES SET FORTH  
IN STATE 20875 WITH THE UNHCR AND GOVERNMENT OF BANGLADESH.  
AS WE HAVE REPORTED, THE RESULTS ARE UNCERTAIN AND THE RELIEF  
EFFORT REMAINS IMPERFECT.  
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## Message Attributes

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